

# THE NEW ETHICS BEAT

Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics & Public Trust  
19 West Flagler Street ■ Suite 209 ■ Miami, FL 33130 ■ 305 579-2594 ■ [www.miamidade.gov/ethics](http://www.miamidade.gov/ethics)

Autumn 2006

## Executive Director's Corner

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### Ethics Commissioners

Kerry E. Rosenthal, Chair  
Gail Dotson, Vice-Chair  
Dawn Addy  
Judge Seymour Gelber  
Brenda Rivera

Several years ago the Miami Dade Commission on Ethics, with help from its Ethics Coalition partners, began sponsoring a series of debates for candidates seeking countywide offices—Mayor, County Commission, and School Board. Hardly a novel concept, candidate forums and debates are beneficial for several reasons, such as providing the public with a better understanding of a candidate's position on the issues, enabling the public to observe a candidate's ability to react under the pressure of a debate, and giving a candidate a forum to distinguish himself/herself from the other candidates.

The content of our ethics debates, however, is somewhat unique: the purpose is for candidates to express their views and articulate their positions on accountability measures, good government initiatives, and other ethics reforms. Furthermore, we trust that the candidates will explain during the course of the debate the manner by which they will conduct themselves with integrity as elected officials. Additionally, the rationale for these ethics debates goes beyond candidates attempting to draw attention to their own personal ethics or vilify their opponents' lack of ethics. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the candidate's ability to identify specific policies and practices that would reinforce the government's commitment to ethical governance.

We have found that such forums are well attended by potential voters and interested parties and cover subjects that are generally glossed over at other candidate forums or debates.

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## Request a Speaker

Phone

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(305) 350-0630

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## Judge Seymour Gelber Featured Commissioner

Judge Seymour Gelber was appointed to the Commission on Ethics in 2005 by the Chief Judge of the Eleventh Circuit. Judge Gelber was a Senior Judge with the Circuit Court, Juvenile Division. Following retirement from the Circuit Court, he served as an Administrative Court Judge, Juvenile Division. Subsequent to his work on the bench, Judge Gelber was elected Mayor of the City of Miami Beach, holding office there from 1991 to 1997.

Judge Gelber's volunteer work includes membership on the Miami Beach Charter Review Committee and the School Board Committee on Ethics, as well as Chair of Friends of the Miami Beach Regional Library. Additionally, Judge Gelber supports several children's issues through projects he heads as President of the Dade County Boys Club After-Care Program, as Chairman Emeritus of the Miami-Dade Criminal Justice Council, and as a member of the American Bar Association Committee on Juvenile Justice.

## Conflicting Contractor Responsibilities Prohibited

The Ethics Ordinance at 2-11.1 (j) has been interpreted by the Ethics Commission to prohibit firms from engaging in county work that would conflict with their independent judgment. Frequently, this issue arises in long-term construction projects involving the same contracting company at different phases of development.

Recent Requests for Opinions, RQO 06-07 and RQO 06-24, specify that firms awarded new contracts for projects on which their employees have already worked or are currently working must submit a written report to both the Executive Director of the Ethics Commission and the project manager stating that their previous or concurrent duties do not conflict with new contract responsibilities. Reports must be submitted within 90 days of the issuance of the new contract.

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Character is much  
easier kept than  
recovered.

Thomas Paine.

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## Ethics Commission Receives 2<sup>nd</sup> NACo Achievement Award

The National Association of County Organizations (NACo) recently recognized the Ethics Commission with a second Achievement Award for its innovative Campaign Ethics Forums held during the 2004-2005 election cycle. The Forums aimed at shifting the tone of local campaigns to issues of public accountability and government transparency—rather than on sensationalized or negative messages. The events proved to be a meeting ground in which the public interacted directly with the candidates exclusively on topics concerning ethical governing. Various candidates for county mayor, county commission, school board, municipal mayors, city councils, and city clerks joined the electorate at nine different gatherings throughout the county.

This is the second consecutive year in which the Ethics Commission has received a NACo Achievement Award. Last year, NACo recognized the Ethics Commission's Model Ethics Program, a course offered at public high schools. The program encourages students to analyze ethical dilemmas through role-playing exercises based on real-life experiences.

## Executive Director's Corner

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Due to the "positive buzz" surrounding the initial set of ethics debates held during the election cycle of 2004, a fair share of Miami-Dade County municipal governments have requested our assistance in organizing ethics forums for their municipal candidates as well.

The Ethics Commission recognizes that fostering an ethical climate in local municipal governments is highly valued by residents within our jurisdiction. We will continue to do our part to coordinate these types of forums as an important component of our community outreach programs.

Genuine politics  
...  
is simply a matter of  
serving those  
around us—  
serving the  
community  
and  
serving those who  
will come after.

Vaclav Havel

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Contact the  
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Commission:

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(305) 579-2594

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(305) 579-0273

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Anonymous Tips  
(Hotline):  
(305) 579-9093

Request a Speaker:  
(305) 350-0630

Website:  
[www.miamidade.gov/ethics](http://www.miamidade.gov/ethics)

## Words to the Wise

- **CRIMINAL INTENT:** The State Attorney's Office has concurrent jurisdiction with the Ethics Commission in cases involving ethics violations with criminal intent.
- **SECTION 8 HOUSING VOUCHERS:** County employees not employed by the Housing Agency who wish to rent to Section 8 housing tenants must obtain permission from the Ethics Commission. Information is available at [www.miamidade.gov/ethics](http://www.miamidade.gov/ethics).
- **GIFTS OVER \$100:** County and municipal elected officials, employees, and board members covered by the county gift ordinance must disclose any individual gift over \$100 received in a calendar quarter. State Form 9 or the County Quarterly Gift Disclosure Form may be filed with the relevant municipal clerk or clerk of the BCC.
- **OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT:** County and municipal employees who engage in outside employment must, first, obtain permission from their supervisors and, second, disclose outside employment income annually. The Outside Employment Statement is available at [http://elections.miamidade.gov/employment\\_outside.asp](http://elections.miamidade.gov/employment_outside.asp) and should be filed with the respective municipal or county clerk every year.

You can report  
unethical conduct  
or  
abuses  
in local  
government  
anonymously.

Call the  
**ETHICS  
HOTLINE**  
at

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(305) 579-9093

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or visit our website  
at  
[www.miamidade.gov/ethics](http://www.miamidade.gov/ethics).

## Running for Office—What Every Candidate Ought to Know

The Ethics Commission held a two-hour workshop on August 23, 2006, at Miami Shores C. Lawton McCall Community Center to provide essential information to local candidates about legal and ethical campaign obligations. Among the topics discussed were responsibilities associated with running an ethical campaign, duties for reporting and disclosing financial statements, and best practices regarding collecting and expending campaign funds. Robert Meyers, Executive Director of the Ethics Commission; Joe Centorino, Chief of the Public Corruption Unit at the State Attorney's Office; and Maria Acosta from the Miami-Dade County Department of Elections were featured speakers.

Stay Tuned  
for  
Coming Events:

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- **Government Ethics & Procurement Conference**
- **Brown Bag Community Ethics Lunch Series**
- **Election Forums**